Tells the Facts and Names the Names

$2.50

CounterPunch

February 16-28, 2005 *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* VOL. 12, NO. 04

Our Little Secrets

24 / 7 Syndrome

By Alexander Cockburn

Relentlessly, the increased hours Americans have to work, just to squeeze by, is sapping their will to live any sort of pleasant life, at least in terms of the way "pleasant" was parsed half a century ago.

Joe Paff, president of CounterPunch's secret government, says his older brother Bill worked for Douglas Aircraft in Long Beach in the 1960s as a blue collar line inspector, had a $19,000 house in Anaheim with hardwood floors, two bedrooms, swimming pool, new car every year or so, boat and trailer, and time to enjoy them.

There were millions like Bill and his wife. Back then, when the incomes of ordinary working people reached their apex, the average family lived in an affordable house with a couple of late-model cars at reasonable insurance rates. Their kids could go to college either for free or cheaply. The man worked reasonable hours and could even look forward to a decent pension instead of having it looted by Bernie Ebbers. The woman didn't have to work prodigious hours at two thirds of the man's rate of pay so that they could meet the mortgage payments. They might have a little hideaway in the country. They were not so exhausted that they fell asleep over their supper. They stayed up night after night to watch Johny Carson on The Tonight Show, having already enjoyed light-hearted commentary on their happy condition from Jackie Gleason. The whining racism of Archie Bunker was still ahead, in the 1970s, when the fortunes of the white working class began to dip.

As the Economic Policy Institute's State of Working America 2004-5 Report instructs us, any story of rising income for working families across the past quarter century is, at bottom, a story about rising

(**OLS** *continued on page 2)*

Enough of "Frames"

What About the Big Picture?

By STEVEN SHERMAN

The contemporary American left lacks imagination. There's the familiar agenda — end military occupations, stop defunding schools and other public services, universal health care, a living wage – but for the most part, these proposals could be incorporated into the existing power structures. Most Western European societies, after all, have gone some distance towards completing this menu. The liberals' flavor of the season, George Lakoff, limits himself to the question of how to argue for or 'frame' these issues, rather than examining or expanding the agenda itself.

But while such policies would certainly improve the quality of life for many people, they do not really address the overall mess, which is characterized by vast inequalities, a disempowered and overworked citizenry, self-perpetuating gender roles, environmental degradation, a life spent in cars, and so forth.

Gar Alperovitz's new book, *America Beyond Capitalism: Reclaiming Our Wealth, Our Liberty, and Our Democracy*, makes a serious effort to restore a visionary quality to the left. The book has some problems, but it is a highly valuable start.

Alperovitz begins by describing the contemporary U.S. and finds it wanting. He emphasizes arguments of both liberals and conservatives that wealth gaps, corporate power, expanding government, and decreasing time away from work have eroded equality, liberty and democracy. Perhaps the most striking elements of his argument, for those familiar with the many leftist and liberal polemics on these topics, are his claim that traditional tax-and-spend redistribution schemes have had only limited effects on inequality and his embrace of the traditional conservative argument that big government (and government has steadily expanded, under Democrats and Republicans alike) is incompatible with democracy. Both of these conclusions lead him to downplay an agenda of rebuilding the welfare state in favor of an alternative he calls "the pluralist commonwealth".

Rather than focusing on the redistribution of wealth to alleviate, but not displace, fundamental inequalities, "pluralist commonwealth" ideas focus on how to bring wealth under democratic control. Now, the democratic control of wealth seems so alien to our modern American plutocracy (where about three thousand people make most of the important decisions regarding the uses of capital) that it will probably come as a surprise that he identifies many models which already exist and thrive in the US, as often in Red states as in Blue.

These include:

* use of pension funds for social purposes (he emphasizes the experiences of CalPERS, the California Teachers' Pension Fund)

* control of enterprises (including cable providers, sports teams, landfill gas recovery operations, etc.) or land by cities

* Community Development Corporations that recycle profits from enterprises back into the communities

* stakeholder strategies (such as the checks Alaskans receive from the oil revenue of the state, or proposals to give people grants upon their sixteenth birthday)

* worker-owned firms and proposals for how to bring corporations under public control, such as the proposal that corporations be required to renew their charters

(**Big Picture** *continued on page 3)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**OLS** *continued from page 1*)
annual work hours, particularly among women.

Even if we take into account the overall drop in working hours because of recession in 2000-2002, the average number of hours worked annually by all families was 11 percent higher than in 1975. This was the year when these data first became available. You want to find out about hours women worked before then? It's impossible to do so with any pretense of accuracy. No one thought to collect the data. If women in poor families hadn't gone to work in the years after 1979, their family income would have fallen by almost 14 percent.

It's always eerie how quickly people accept sharply changed circumstances as normalcy, like paying 22 percent interest on a credit card debt and watching payments on all cards get hiked to the fiercest interest rate if they're late on one payment. Twenty years ago those were credit terms the FBI took to be proof of Mafia membership and got prosecutors to file charges of extortion. Now, both parties in Congress leap to obey when the credit card companies – i.e. the banks – issue their commands. Latest to come under the axe is Chapter 7 bankruptcy, where bankrupts could go down and not have repayments through their next ten incarnations, which is what Chapter 11 bankruptcy mandates.

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Business
Becky Grant

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions/supporters
$30 student/low-income
CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org

"Safety" under Franco

First, a note from Tao Ruspoli, my esteemed Italian-American nephew-in-law.

Hi Alexander,

I belong to an email group of flamenco aficionados, and a discussion about precautions tourists should take while circulating in Granada at night turned into a comment by someone about how much safer the streets were when Franco was around. I replied that it's a funny definition of safety when you feel safe from petty criminals by living at the mercy of an unrestricted and brutal police force...but, alas, I was alone, everyone who was around in Spain says I don't know what I'm talking about and that kids could go out at night and the parents didn't have to worry, there was little to no crime, and that all this was worth sacrificing a few "rights". "What good are 'rights' when you are being mugged" was one ghastly comment I read.

Have you a witty and decisive retort to these fascist apologists? Tao.

I referred this to Vicente Navarro. Vicente grew up in Catalonia, fought in the underground against Franco, went into exile and has been an implacable chronicler of the darkness of the Franco era. These days , he's professor of public policy at Johns Hopkins, leading the research demonstrating the ties between inequality and poor health in societies.

Dear Alex,

The only way I can answer the question raised by the flamenco aficionado is referring to my own experience when I lived under the fascist dictatorship. Franco and his generals knew that they had the majority of people against them. This is the reason why they used terror as a political strategy.

The fascist general in charge of the occupying forces in Andalusia (where Granada is located) – foreign legionnaires and marroquies troops – encouraged them to be brutal, raping and cutting off women's breasts before killing them. During the dictatorship, Franco killed more than 200,000 in just six years, 1939-1945. Political assassinations lasted until the dictator's death in 1975.

In Catalonia, Catalans were not allowed to speak their mother tongue and all expression of Catalan identity was forbidden. The first time I was detained in my life by the political police was when I was seven years old for speaking Catalan, my mother tongue. My parents and several members of my family who fought in defense of the Republic were brutally repressed and several of them put in concentration camps.

The "safety" in the streets was a joke. It was only safe for those who agreed with the dictatorship. For all others, it was a nightmare. The repression was brutal – Franco's dictatorship was one of the cruelest in Europe. Torture was the standard practice for any person detained for political reasons or any reasons that displeased the regime. That repression was not only physical, but also psychological. My students in Barcelona cannot believe that when I was their age (20-22 years), I could not hold the hand of my girlfriend, much less kiss her. That was the order and safety in Franco's streets.

Petty crime was not a problem, big crime was. Corruption was widely spread, and the streets were not safe for those who wanted to change that nightmare. I was one of them. I fought in the anti-fascist underground and in 1965 had to leave the country, starting a long exile.

I guess the streets under Nazi's Hitler were also safe. But the big difference is that Hitler was elected and unfortunately had wide popular support. Franco did not. He led a coup against a very popular government and it took him three years to win in spite of having Hitler and Mussolini's troops on his side, while the Republic did not have any support, except the Soviet Union. The Franco Regime was extremely unpopular, particularly among the working class.

You may like to suggest to your nephew to read my book *Bienestar insuficiente democracia incompleta*, which was awarded XXX Premio Anagrama de Ensayo in Spain that is equivalent to the Pulitzer Prize in the U.S. In that book, I speak about the nature of the dictatorship and the process of transition from dictatorship to democracy, a process that took place under the enormous influence of the right, which led to a very incomplete democracy and a very insufficient welfare state. The book is widely available in Spain. Best, Vicente.

Tao's flamenco playing can be heard on a wonderful new CD, recorded by CounterPuncher Pierre Sprey for his Mapleshade Records label. Tao was lent a $20,000 guitar for the session, on condition that the guitar never leave his sight. It didn't, as Tao flew from LAX to BWI, himself in one seat, and the guitar in the one beside him. It was worth the ticket.

Go to mapleshaderecords.com, whose overall sound is testimony to Pierre's motto: music without compromise. No filtering, compression, equalization, or noise reduction. No multi-tracking or over-dubbing. CP

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Big Picture** *continued from page 1)*

every twenty years, at which point they would need to demonstrate that the corporation has served the public good.

Also important to Alperovitz's vision is a decentering of the U.S. in two senses – a strengthening of local institutions (in part through economic strategies such as cities and states buying from local suppliers) and a strengthening of regions (which would include multiple states) at the expense of the federal government.

Two more elements round out the picture. First, he emphasizes the need to target the wealth of the top two per cent, rather than the income of the top 20 per cent as a feasible political strategy. Second, he highlights the need to reduce the work week, both so that citizens have time to participate in democracy and so that child-rearing can be shared by parents, rather than either being overwhelmingly put on the mother's shoulders or handed over to a babysitter (whose own childrearing needs are not addressed) employed by the family.

Discussing both of these principles, Alperovitz emphasizes the seemingly obscure point that the U.S. is actually a very wealthy society, one that is likely, even with moderate rates of economic growth, to be much wealthier as this century goes on. We have plenty of resources to address problems, if those resources are democratically controlled.

Alperowitz's is an exciting vision. It presents a reasonably plausible notion of what socialism might look like in the 21st century, if we take the term to mean collective control of wealth and resources, rather than state control of the economy. Furthermore, Alperovitz mobilizes data to show that many aspects of his program have been embraced as practical policy solutions by actors on the right as well as the left. Alabama politicians might be surprised to see the actions of the state's pension fund — including investment in local industry and the purchasing of a controlling share in U.S. Airways to bring jobs to the state — praised in a book by a left-wing historian.

The elements of Alperovitz's "pluralist commonwealth" seem simultaneously more ambitious than most contemporary left/liberal thinking and less remote from the potentialities of American political life. Below I'll just mention a few reservations, although I strongly recommend this book.

First, Alperovitz tends to take contemporary economic growth figures and extrapolate predictions that show Americans having vast wealth by the end of the next century. There are several problems with this. The concept of economic growth was created as mass-production factories were emerging. It seemed sensible enough to believe that if a national society produced 6,000 refrigerators this year and 6,600 next year, the society was 10 per cent wealthier (presuming this reflected a broader trend). Similarly, it was an unequivocally good thing if a factory could double its production of refrigerators in a year.

But these concepts become meaningless in an economy increasingly dominated by services. Is the U.S. 10 per cent richer if advertising firms produce 10 per cent more ads in a year? Is it an unequivocally good thing if doctors can see twice as many patients in a day as they could last year? Extrapolating these trends over decades leads to a dystopia in which society is ever more cluttered with ever more meaningless services. With rising environmental degradation, it is no longer so obvious that a society is wealthier as it produces more and more cars, steel, or appliances. Rather than simply have continuous economic growth over the next century, we are likely to see a disaggregation of the relationship of technology to economic innovation.

Alabama politicians might be surprised to see the actions of the state's pension fund praised in a book by a left-wing historian.

In other words, instead of the now familiar question of 'what technologies will enhance productivity' (with everything else falling into the realm of unintended consequences), the question will increasingly be 'what sorts of technology can create sustainable, pleasant communities?' (or, on a dystopian note, 'what sort of technologies can preserve existing inequalities?'). Instead of continuing the race for productivity and economic growth, we may see the emergence of various cooperative or planned relations between democratically controlled enterprises. Related to this, the global justice movement has been developing numerous proposals, some quite provisional, some more detailed, about how to simply share wealth, rather than generate it (open-source programming, copy left proposals, etc). Within Alperovitz's paradigm, do we really want all those worker- or municipally-owned enterprises to compete with each other to be as efficient as possible? Why?

Secondly, for someone who intellectually came of age with the new left in the sixties, there is a curious blind spot in Alperovitz's vision. The new left frequently emphasized that modern society is not only defined by a capitalist class that controls most of the wealth, but also by a bureaucratic/professional class that controls institutions. In fact, during the sixties the capitalist class was, to some extent, in the background, and many new left critiques foregrounded the role of professional expertise in maintaining inequality.

Over the last three decades, the capitalist class has roared back into conspicuous control, and many bureaucratic institutions have been defunded. So it has often been the case that the priority is simply to demand funding for education, health care, anti-poverty programs, etc., rather than critique the power relations they embody. But a long-term agenda for the left should raise these questions. Most of what the home-school theorists say about schools – that they are soul-sucking institutions that generate a subset of pathologies within the student body – is true, although advocating home schooling as a societal policy would likely increase inequalities inherited from parents. But what sort of educational institutions should the left advocate for? Again, 'well-funded schools' just isn't an ambitious enough answer.

In health, hierarchies of doctors, nurses, and orderlies, originally cemented under conditions of racial and gender apartheid, remain in place. Furthermore, higher education levels hold the potential to transform doctor/patient relations. The "pathology vision" of health care – in which the health profession is largely devoted to curing, rather than preventing disease, let alone facilitating health – mostly remains in place as well. The left should be broadly rethinking what we mean by notions of health, education, a good workplace, etc. What can link these questions to the agenda described by Alperovitz is the need to put questions of control and democracy at the center of the vision. Bureaucratic classes whose power is legitimated by a centralized government are ultimately incompatible with those values.

(**Big Picture** *continued on page 6 col 3)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

King of the Hill and the Master Appropriator

How Ted Stevens Strikes It Rich

By JEFFREY ST. CLAIR

Ted Stevens is now the longest-serving Republican in Congress. From his eyrie in the US senate, the Alaska Republican exerts his power over a vast terrain of legislation and budgeting, from the logging of the Tongass National Forest to the development of the Star Wars missile defense scheme.

He became the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee in 1997, and his power duly multiplied. Through his machinations, federal spending in Alaska has nearly doubled in the past eight years. On a per capita basis, Alaska now leads the nation in the receipt of federal money, at nearly $12,000 for each resident and twice the national average.

Alaska also now occupies the top spot for so-called earmarked appropriations, special pet-projects in home states of senators and representatives on the Appropriations committees. Under Stevens' sway, Alaska now gets more than $611 in federal funds for each Alaskan for these special earmarks. The national average for earmarked pork projects is $19 per capita.

Of course, this money doesn't go directly into the pockets of all Alaskans, but is channeled into projects benefiting the senator's political patrons and in some cases into projects in which the senator and his family own a financial stake.

Among the special earmarks engineered by Stevens: a $2 million project to monitor Alaska's skies for volcanic ash, a provision that ended up as a segment on the TV show "West Wing"; $1 million for an airport on remote St. Georges Island; $2.5 million to train Russian workers for jobs in Alaska's offshore and Arctic oil fields; $15 million to the University of Alaska to study the aurora borealis.

Ted Stevens is a leading foe of the Endangered Species Act. He has tried to demolish the nation's premier wildlife law by cutting funding to enforce its provisions and by intimidating Fish and Wildlife Service personnel.

Even so, the senator has shoveled federal money into wildlife projects that benefit friends and backers in Alaska. In 2003, he inserted line items in the mammoth federal spending bill that gave $4 million to study how to aid beached sea lions and $100,000 for a census of Pacific walrus populations. He has redirected millions in federal funding away from the study of salmon stocks in Oregon, Washington and northern California, where the fish are endangered, up to salmon projects in Alaska, where fish populations are relatively stable.

Stevens also used his power to direct a $22 million gift disguised as emergency relief to four Southeast Alaska towns. The money was supposed to soften the blow from decreased logging on the Tongass National Forest, American's largest temperate rainforest, caused by the closure of two pulp mills. Thanks to Stevens' intervention, the logging on the Tongass has continued unabated, despite pleas from scientists and wildlife biologists who charge that the cutting is endangering hundreds of species of wildlife. Still the supposedly timber-dependent communities of Sitka and Ketchikan are happy to get the money, since when the mills were operating they saw little flow their way. "We owe Senator Stevens a lot," says Stan Fuller, mayor of Sitka. "For years, we didn't get anything. Flat nothing. It was like we weren't even here."

The Stevens' diet: Alaskan "salmon jerky" as a part of the basic ration kit for troops in Afghanistan, South Korea and Iraq.

* * *

Stevens, who portrays himself as a gritty pioneer from Girdwood, Alaska, is actually a Hoosier. He was born in Indianapolis in 1923 and moved to Huntington Beach, California, as a teen. During World War II, Stevens served under General Clair Chenault as a pilot in the quasi-private Air Force known as the Flying Tigers, an enterprise that would over the course of a few decades evolve into the CIA's Air America. In China, Stevens ferried Chaing Kai-Shek's KMT fighters over the Himalayas to camps in Burma and Nepal. At the time and for decades to come, the KMT financed their war against the Japanese and Mao's Red Army through the opium trade.

After the war, Stevens returned to southern California, where he got a degree at UCLA. Then he was off to law school at Harvard. From Harvard, Stevens embarked for Alaska to strike it rich. But his private practice soon fizzled in the thinly populated territory. In 1953, he was rescued from these professional doldrums by his friend Fred Seaton, who secured Stevens a position as US District Attorney for Fairbanks. Seaton soon became Eisenhower's Interior Secretary, and he brought Stevens with him to D.C. to serve as his chief counsel.

The young lawyer divided his time over the next six years between two consuming tasks: securing statehood for Alaska and opening up as much land as possible in the new state to plunder by timber, mining and oil companies. As a reward for his services, Ike elevated Stevens to the position of solicitor for the Interior Department, a position he held for a year until Kennedy gave him the boot.

With his resume fattened up, Stevens returned to Alaska, setting up shop as an oil-industry lawyer in Anchorage, where he laid the groundwork for opening the North Slope to the oil cartels. But his time in Washington had fired Stevens' political ambitions. Billing himself as the man who won Alaska's statehood, Stevens was elected to Alaska's House of Representatives, where he quickly rose to the position of Speaker.

In 1968, Alaska's senator Bob Bartlett died suddenly, and the state's governor, Wally Hickel, soon to become Nixon's In-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terior Secretary, tapped Stevens to fill the empty senate seat. A year later, Stevens held onto the seat in a special election and since then he has never faced a serious challenge.

A party loyalist, Stevens stuck with his patron Nixon even as the president crashed in the wreckage of Watergate. The party rewarded Stevens for his unflinching fidelity. He was handed plum posts in the senate not normally reserved for a senator from a remote and sparsely populated state. He moved from assistant Republican whip to chair or ranking member of the powerful Government Affairs and Commerce committees, as well as the Defense Appropriations subcommittee. And finally he landed the most desired position in Congress, the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. By 1985, Ted Stevens was king of the Hill.

It was around this time that Stevens began to gripe publicly about the great financial sacrifice he had made by devoting his professional career to the political stewardship of Alaska. These periodic outbursts, often at town meetings in places such as Seward and Ketchikan, may have been ignited by the rise of his fellow Republican from Alaska, Frank Murkowski. Murkowski, a relative newcomer to the state, had made millions as an investment banker before moving to Anchorage and running for the senate.

But Stevens had also suffered a severe financial reversal in 1986, when a crab-fishing venture into which he'd sunk more than a million dollars went bust. Stevens was mired in debt and chafing about his meager senate salary of $130,000 a year.

Soon thereafter Stevens began to use his position as overlord for $800 billion in annual federal spending to steer government contracts and subsidies to enterprises owned by friends, family members, and business associates. Within a few years, Stevens was a millionaire like Murkowski. So too were his wife, his son, and his brother-in-law.

Ted Stevens was perfectly positioned to profiteer from these kinds of giveaways devised in the inner chambers of his senate offices and buried in the subtext of spending bills that are hundreds of pages thick. Not only did Stevens control the purse strings of the government, but for years he also chaired the Senate Ethics Committee, which wrote and enforced the rules on conflicts of interest involving senators and family members — rules that proved very lax indeed.

***

Like the sons of Trent Lott and Harry Reid, Ted Stevens' son Ben works as a top lobbyist in D.C., pulling in big fees by trading on his father's unrivaled position in the senate. For example, in 2000 Senator Stevens earmarked $30 million in disaster relief funds to the Southwest Alaska Municipal Agency. The agency promptly hired Ben Stevens to advise the group on how those funds should be spent.

Dozens of other Alaska companies have sought the services of the senator's son. From 2001 to 2004, Ben Stevens' financial disclosure forms show that he has been paid more than $750,000 in lobbying and consulting fees. Stevens notes that he considers his lobbying business only "part-time" work. That's because his full-time job for most of that time was to head up the Alaska Special Olympics, which his father financed with a $10 million federal appropriation. Ben Stevens was paid $715,000 as director of the organization.

During that time, Ben was also working for VECO, a large oil services company, that had built pipelines in Alaska and in southwest Asia. Ben Stevens was paid more than $210,000 by VECO from the late 1990s through 2002. In 1999, VECO had built a $70 million pipeline in Pakistan. When the Pakistan government was slow to pay up, VECO complained to Senator Stevens. Stevens told the Pakistanis that he would hold up a big trade deal with the country until they ponied up the money to VECO. The Pakistanis complied, and the trade pact was approved.

Ben Stevens' stunning success as lobbyist is remarkable considering the fact that until 1998 he had no experience at all as either a lobbyist or a consultant. Indeed, he had spent the previous 15 years working on a commercial fishing boat in the Bering Sea. But this experience on the icy ocean has also come in handy in Washington.

The senator claims that he rarely speaks to his son about legislative matters, except when they involve commercial fishing. "Ben's an expert on fishing," Stevens told the *Anchorage Daily News*.

Indeed, Ben Stevens gets paid $170,000 from the Alaskan fishing industry to guard their interests in Washington. He soon proved his value. In 2003, as the invasion of Iraq was in high gear, the Bush administration sent an emergency request to Congress for $80 billion to fund the war. Senator Stevens saw this as a fail-safe way to spread a little cheer to his son and his clients. Deep inside the war spending bill, Stevens embedded a provision, long-sought by the Alaska fishing industry, forcing the Department of Agriculture to classify wild salmon caught in Alaskan waters as an "organic" food. The designation would allow the fishing industry to significantly mark up the price of such certified fish.

Stevens also used the Pentagon funding bill as cover for two more fishing measures: a $45 million subsidy to Alaskan fisheries and a provision requiring the military to purchase only American fish, 80 per cent of which comes from Alaska.

Later, Stevens promised that his next move on their behalf was a scheme to compel the military to include "salmon jerky" as a part of the basic ration kit for troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

* * *

In 2000, Stevens engineered and pushed through a measure that amended the Defense Appropriations Act to allow tiny Alaskan Native Corporations to receive no-bid contracts from the Pentagon (and, later, the Department of Homeland Security) worth hundreds of

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year $40 Two yrs $70
($35 email only / $45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $30
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

_____

Payment must accompany order, or dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $12.50 for Canadian and $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want Counter-Punch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch**
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**Stevens** *continued from page 5)*

millions of dollars. The tribal entities were under no obligation to actually perform the work. Instead, they could simply subcontract it out to big defense contractors, such as SAIC and Bechtel, at a handsome profit. In essence, the tribal corporations act as cutouts for big companies that don't enjoy the same loopholes in federal contracting provisions.

One of those tribal companies pays $6 million a year to lease an office building owned by Senator Stephens and his business partners. Stephens sees no conflict of interest in the deal. "I'm a passive investor," Stephens told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I don't make the business decisions." Not from the corporate side maybe, but as the overseer of $800 billion federal discretionary spending he makes sure that those businesses enjoy a generous supply of federal funding.

While Stevens is willing to exploit the tribes as cutouts to steer millions to favored projects and businesses, he shows open disdain for the aspirations of the tribes themselves. In the fall of 2003, Stevens took to the airwaves to publicly lambaste the tribes for wanting to assert control over their own lands, tribal members and tribal enterprises. Stevens vowed to use his power to block any federal funding for tribal courts in native villages and accused the tribes of trying to destroy the state.

"The road they are on now is the destruction of Alaska," Stevens warned in a racist diatribe carried on Alaskan Public Radio. "The native population is increasing at a much, much greater rate. I don't know if you know that. And they want total jurisdiction over what happens in a tribal village, without regard to state law and without regard to federal law. If all the villages in Alaska are tribes, more than half the tribes in the United States are in Alaska, and if each one is entitled to a court…uh, you see, it's not going to happen."

Stevens' outburst enraged Alaskan tribal leaders and civil rights advocates. "As an Alaskan native person, I take very strong offense to the statements made by the senator," says Heather Kendall-Miller, an attorney with the Native American Rights Fund. "He talks about it as if it were 'us' versus 'them.' I haven't heard that kind of talk since I don't know when. It's assault on tribalism."

Stevens has been accused of running a kind of legislative protection racket. In 2001, Stevens intervened to save a $450 million military housing contract in Alaska that the Pentagon wanted to cancel. The contract was held by an Anchorage firm run by a longtime friend of the senator. This friend had made Stevens a partner in several lucrative real estate deals. Since 1998, Stevens' initial $50,000 investment in the firm had yielded the senator more than $750,000 in profits.

It's not all about making money. It's also about self-glorification. In 2001, Stevens implanted $2.2 million in federal money to underwrite the expansion of the Anchorage airport. And what is this new facility called? Ted Stevens International Airport, an honor usually reserved for the dead, or at least the retired. CP

(**Big Picture** *continued from page 3)*

Alperovitz is not completely silent on one other area, but he is quite glib, almost to the point of being dismissive. In the last couple of pages, he belatedly mentions "global issues and international relations," writing that efforts to reign in the U.S. "are both essential and laudable." But ultimately, he believes, change in the way the U.S. relates to the wider world will only come with change at home. This misses entirely the dynamics between changes at home and struggles abroad. Consider the way the pressure of the cold war (i.e., fears that newly decolonized nations would 'go red') aided the civil rights movement, or the way the Vietnamese struggle for independence helped trigger the New Left.

Isn't the question of how the U.S. (or various sub-national groupings) might virtuously relate to the rest of the world relevant? Shouldn't democratization of wealth strategies have a global component (the corporations, after all, are already quite multinational)? In light of the likely difficulties of achieving a just foreign economic policy at the national level, might municipalities or universities initiate efforts to further "pluralist commonwealth" strategies in sister institutions worldwide?

These sorts of questions should not obscure Alperovitz's achievement. He has synthesized a number of theoretical and practical developments to produce a convincing portrait of a decentralized and pluralistic form of socialism. Such a vision, if embraced and refined by progressives, could provide far higher-grade fuel than simply improving our "framing" skills. CP

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED